

De Quincey's life and his writing are fueled by a sense that he abhors what he adores — and vice versa. He recalls that, when he was younger, he had “a perfect craze for being despised. I doted on it, and considered contempt a sort of luxury that I was in continual fear of losing.” This thought shines as much light on those who feel contempt as on those who suffer it. Before the visions of his opium-induced dreams, he admits, “I stood loathing and fascinated.” Loathing, for him, is itself a kind of fascination; to be disgusted is to be implicated. (He writes of how disgust may “fasten on” things, rather than, say, “recoil from” them.) These rhythms of affection and animus, connection and repulsion, were to leave their mark on De Quincey's life in the Lake District. He fell in love with a farmer's daughter, Margaret Simpson, and the couple had a son before they were married, in 1817; the relationship, along with his increasing dependence on opium, put strain on his bond with Wordsworth. De Quincey would later recall his alienation from his father figure and admit, “I feel a rising emotion of hostility — nay, something, I fear, too nearly akin to vindictive hatred.”

